

IN OUR VIEW

Russell does right thing

TDI EDITORIAL BOARD

The Russell City Council had a public hearing on data centers that may locate in its city. A few weeks ago, the mayor organized a meeting of the city council to discuss a proposed data center in Russell. The mayor abruptly adjourned the meeting after about 15 minutes because members of the audience wanted to be heard.

Members of the city council did not object to adjournment, but they did circulate a memo to conduct another meeting with public comment. This week, they conducted a public meeting on a proposed data center that generated many comments from audience members.

Data centers are a hot-button issue in our area and everywhere else. Maysville just agreed to an enormous data center to be built by Meta (Facebook). Data centers are popping up everywhere in the country.

The Russell City Council should be considered for the Profile in Courage Award. The award is given annually by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. It goes to the elected official(s) who made a positive action in the face of controversy.

The election is only a few weeks away. Russell has a contested race for mayor and city council. The easy thing for them to do on this issue is simply schedule a meeting for public input right after the election. We commend them for doing the meeting this week.

Now comes the hard part: the decision on establishing zoning for a proposed data center on the former AK Steel property. About 60% of the former steel mill is located in Russell. Some is located in Boyd County and a small percentage in Ashland.

Russell has a six-month moratorium on data centers. That expires in December. A European company named Rubix wants to build the 2-gigawatt data center. The property once housed Armco Steel, which at one time employed 5,000-plus steelworkers. For any retired Armco or AK Steel worker or family member to look at that property, it's frankly depressing.

The once proud steel mill and the thousands of workers are not coming back. Surely this weighs in the minds of the mayor and council members. Now, they're faced with the decision on lifting the moratorium and establishing zoning and building regulations for a data center.

So far, we give Russell officials high marks. They didn't sign non-disclosure agreements and seemed to be keeping everything on top of the table. Others could learn how Russell has handled this issue.

Too few voting places

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Readers should have received a postcard last week from Boyd County Clerk Kevin Johnston informing you where to vote. There are too few locations to vote, especially in Ashland where you can vote at Unity Baptist Church on 29th Street and First Christian Church at 2320 29th Street. That's it.

That's only two places to vote in east Kentucky's largest city. Ashland had four locations in the primary election. Catlettsburg has one voting location at the senior citizen center. Rural Boyd County has four locations, including one in Westwood.

The reduction in voting locations is governed by the county board of elections. Part of the problem with having additional voting locations is a lack of poll workers. They receive very little money for a 12-plus-hour days.

In previous years, Boyd County had more than two dozen voting locations. The reduction of voting locations will almost certainly cause an undue hardship on those who choose to vote on Election Day.

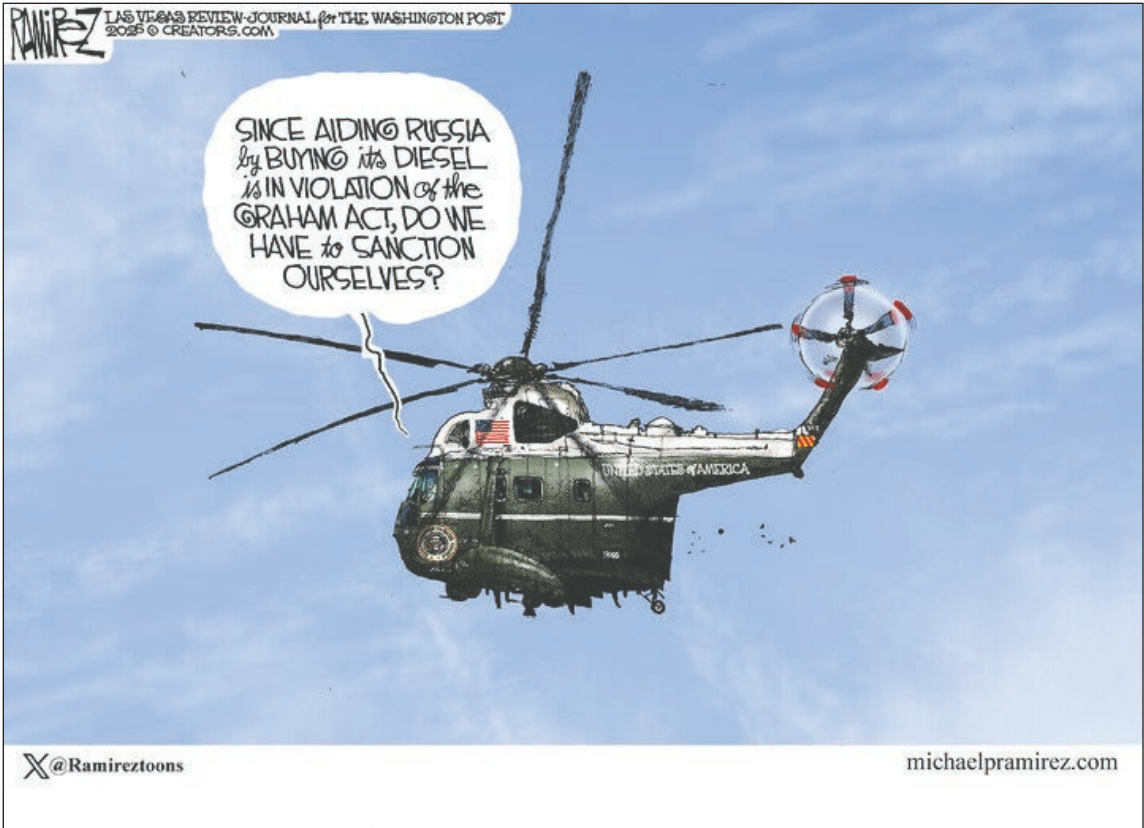
In Boyd County, you'll have seven locations to vote. In Greenup County, you'll have 13 different locations to vote on Election Day. Most in Greenup County are in schools of fire departments. This is a better place because residents, including new residents, likely know where their local fire department or school is located.

You can apply to vote by mail until Oct. 20. Go to gov-oteky.gov or contact your county clerk for information.

In-person early voting without an excuse takes place Oct. 29-31 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.

While too few poll workers are available, Boyd County, in the past, has spent millions of dollars on updated voting machines. We hope the convenience of voters will receive more consideration.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievance.



When it comes to Medicaid cuts in Kentucky, it's always Groundhog Day

Over the next few years, Kentucky is facing the largest Medicaid cuts in the program's history. Starting in January, the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act will take Medicaid coverage away from many thousands of Kentuckians.

Separately, state Medicaid cuts will go into effect in July unless the 2027 General Assembly restores funding to the program. And in January 2028, the OBBBA will begin lowering Medicaid payments to providers with reductions that will deepen over the following decade.

If allowed to occur, these perilous cuts will worsen Kentuckians' health and well-being, increase burdensome medical debt, and cost providers and jobs including by putting 35 rural hospitals at risk of closure.

The cuts are the latest in a long series of threats. Medicaid has faced danger ever since the Affordable Care Act (ACA) expanded the program in 2010 and became a political punching bag. But here's the thing: time after time, in the face of organized public opposition, decision makers have halted major Medicaid rollbacks before the pain to communities began.

That tells us a lot about what's at stake. And it shows why Kentuckians should urge federal and state lawmakers to stop harmful cuts yet again.

The push to cut Medicaid and repeal the ACA began as soon as the law passed. Republicans were unified in their opposition and rode the Tea Party wave in the 2010 midterms catalyzed in part by opposition to so-called Obamacare. Opponents demonized the ACA and capitalized on all it didn't do to fix an ailing American health care system, while obscuring the good it did.

However, then-Governor Steve Beshear expanded Medicaid under the ACA in 2013, citing an obscure state law and acting right after the General Assembly had adjourned for the year. By the time the legislature reconvened, thousands of people were already gaining

coverage and getting health-care. Republicans controlled the state Senate and could have picked a fight over blocking Medicaid expansion and refusing the federal funds.

But knowing that would be devastating to constituents and providers, they stood aside.

Nevertheless, rhetorical opposition to Obamacare continued throughout the 2010s — with the U.S. House voting over 50 times to overturn it — until Republicans took control of the Congress and the presidency with Donald Trump's election in 2016. But even with a unified government, their effort to repeal the ACA failed with then-dying Senator John McCain's famous "thumbs down" vote on the floor of the Senate. Though Republican leaders expressed disappointment at the loss, some no doubt felt relieved when tens of millions of Americans did not lose their health care.

Back in Kentucky, the legislature kept Medicaid expansion even after Republicans took full control of the legislature in 2016. Then-governor Matt Bevin attempted to establish paperwork requirements like are now in law from the OBBBA but lost in court and then in his re-election bid, in part due to his unpopular positions on health care, education and public employees.

The legislature also tried to put in place similar barriers to Medicaid enrollment through four different bills in 2019,

2020, 2022, and 2025. All of them failed to pass or were largely stripped of their harmful measures after concerted opposition campaigns led by health advocates.

But after Trump was elected a second time with Republican majorities in Congress, lawmakers passed the OBBBA and its major cuts to Medicaid in 2025. Yet fearing backlash, the law was designed so the pain didn't go into effect immediately. It pushed the paperwork barriers until after this year's midterm elections and set the payment cuts to start a year later and grow gradually over time.

Most recently, the Kentucky General Assembly passed a budget in April that underfunded Medicaid by hundreds of millions of dollars compared to the executive branch forecast of costs. That forced Governor Beshear to put in place Medicaid payment cuts this summer. After an outcry from constituents and providers, he reversed course and made extraordinary appropriations to Medicaid that are likely outside his legal authority. Legislators chose not to sue, standing aside yet again and averting the pain that would result.

It's always Groundhog Day when it comes to Medicaid. We see repeated efforts to cut the program and create barriers to care. But after patients, providers and communities organize, lawmakers pull back from the brink.

Will this time be different? If so, we'll finally witness the harm long feared by so many.

JASON BAILEY is executive director of the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, www.kypolicy.org.



JASON BAILEY

THE DAILY Independent

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"In Your View" letters can be mailed to The Daily Independent, P.O. Box 311, Ashland, KY 41105-0311, sent to us by e-mail at letters@dailyindependent.com, faxed to us at (606) 326-2678, or delivered to our office at 1544 Winchester Avenue, Suite 600 in downtown Ashland.